



# Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

SARS is an atypical pneumonia that is suspected to be caused by a virus and that appears to be highly infectious.

All cases have occurred in persons either living in or having traveled to China or Viet Nam, or after close contact with someone who has the illness.

SARS transmission from one person to another is prevented by good infection control measures.

## WHAT IS SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME?

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is an atypical pneumonia that is a new emerging disease that started in Asia in November 2002. SARS appears to be highly infectious – that is, passed relatively easily from patients to close contacts.

Between 16 November 2002 and 26 March 2003, at least 1,323 persons worldwide developed SARS, with 49 deaths.

The cause is suspected to be a virus, though further studies are needed to confirm this.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF POSSIBLE SARS?

- ✓ Fever  $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $100.8^{\circ}\text{F}$ )  
AND
- ✓ One or more of: Cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing  
AND
- ✓ One or more of the following:
  - Provided care for, lived with, or have had direct contact with secretions or fluids of a person with SARS, within 10 days of onset of symptoms  
OR
  - Previous travel, within 10 days of onset of symptoms, to an area in which SARS has been transmitted (see below).
- ✓ Other symptoms have included fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, loss of appetite, rash, diarrhea and confusion.
- ✓ SARS is *probable* if all of the above PLUS pneumonia seen on chest x-ray with no other identifiable cause

## WHY HAS THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) SOUNDED THE ALARM ABOUT SARS?

Alarming features of this illness are its ability to progress rapidly to severe, life-threatening pneumonia and the apparent ease of transmission to close contacts, especially family members and health care workers taking care of patients with SARS.

## WHERE HAS SARS BEEN TRANSMITTED?

As of 26 March 2003, transmission of SARS from one person to another has occurred in:

- Hong Kong and Guangdong Province, and Taiwan, China
- Hanoi, Viet Nam
- Singapore
- Toronto, Canada

SARS has also been reported in France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, and United States – but only imported from elsewhere. No cases have been reported in US military members.

## WHO IS AT RISK FOR GETTING SARS?

The disease is spread from person to person but only through close contact with a person with SARS. To date, all of the new cases have been in close contacts, such as family members, those who sat next to a case for a prolonged period of time, or in health workers who have taken care of reported cases. Symptoms usually begin 2 – 7 days after exposure to the illness.

## HOW IS SARS TRANSMISSION PREVENTED?

- ✓ Good hand washing – always the best!
  - ✓ Surgical mask – for the patient or for you when near a person with suspected SARS
- In a health care facility, extra infection control measures should be taken:
- ✓ Eye protection
  - ✓ Gown, gloves
  - ✓ N-95 filtering disposable respirator, or surgical mask
  - ✓ Isolation room with negative pressure

## Fact sheet available:

<http://www.chppmeur.healthcare.hqusareur.army.mil/>

## References and more Information:

1. World Health Organization  
<http://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/>
3. Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs)  
<http://www.ha.osd.mil/>
4. DoD Global Emerging Infections System  
<http://www.geis.ha.osd.mil/>